

CORNELIA GRAY LUNT (1843-1934) PAPERS, 1866-1964

Series 1/11

Box 1

Biography

Cornelia Gray Lunt was born in Chicago on March 19, 1843, her parents having moved to the city from Bowdoinham, Maine the previous year. Her mother was Cornelia A. Gray (1819-1909) and her father was Orrington Lunt (1815-1897), a founder of Northwestern University who was known as the “father of Evanston.” She had two brothers, Horace (1847-1923) and George (1850-1895).

Cornelia Lunt was sent to boarding school in Newburyport, Massachusetts for the years 1853-1854. She was brought home after suffering from homesickness. She then attended the Dearborn Seminary in Chicago from age 13 to 15 and later briefly attended Chicago Central High School. Her last years of formal education, from age 15 to 18, were at the Van Norman Institute, a finishing school in New York City. During her high school years she spent her vacations in Boston. It was there that she met the noted actor Edwin Booth who introduced her to what became a lifelong patronage of and participation in drama and music. Upon completion of her formal education she went abroad, traveling to Europe for the first time.

In October 1871 the Lunt home in Chicago was destroyed in the Great Fire. The following year, the Lunts moved to Evanston where Mr. Lunt had spent much time in connection with his duties as Trustee of Northwestern University and Secretary and Treasurer of Garrett Biblical Institute. Cornelia Lunt remained in the Evanston home for the rest of her life. She named it Anchorfast.

She was devoted to cultural and social activities and traveled often, including a trip with her father to the White House to visit President Lincoln. In Evanston her activities included helping Mrs. Henry Wade (Emma) Rogers to found the (Northwestern) University Guild, a town and gown organization comprised of community and university women who were concerned with promoting the arts. She served as its first President, 1892-1895. In 1894 the first meeting of the Fort Dearborn Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution was held at her home, and subsequently she served as a Regent of the Chapter for two years. She also was one of the founders of the Chicago branch of the Associate Society of Colonial Danes, a charter member of the women’s Fortnightly Club of Chicago, and founder of the Evanston Amateur Concert Club.

Her ties with Northwestern University increased over the years. She and University Trustee James Raymond were instrumental in bringing Professor Peter Christian Lutkin to Northwestern. Under Lutkin’s guidance the failing Conservatory of Music developed into a strong department and eventually became the School of Music at Northwestern.

In 1896 Cornelia Lunt became a member of the Board of Trustees of Northwestern University, serving until 1920. She refrained from joining the Board until 1896 because her father felt that she had too many commitments.

Following her resignation from the Board of Trustees in 1920, she remained quite active, continuing her annual trips to England. Her home at Anchorfast had always been the setting for

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gatherings of University and community friends and neighbors. Northwestern President Walter Dill Scott called Cornelia Lunt the “First Lady of Evanston,” and she was thereafter known by this appellation.

In 1925, at the request of her nieces and nephews, she wrote *Sketches of Childhood and Girlhood*, a privately published reminiscence of her life from 1847 to 1864.

On Christmas Eve 1934 she suffered a heart attack, and she died at her Evanston home two days later. She was buried at Rosehill Cemetery in Chicago.

Description of the Series

The Cornelia Gray Lunt Papers include a variety of scattered miscellaneous materials from 1866 to 1964. They are arranged in four main categories including biographical materials, correspondence, writings, and bound volumes.

The biographical materials include articles about and obituaries of Cornelia Lunt as well as various miscellaneous items including articles relating to the razing of her home after her death. While her own writings contain much information about herself and her family, other biographical materials relating to her father and her family may be found in the Orrington Lunt Papers.

Lunt’s general correspondence, 1896-1927, was conducted with various officers of Northwestern University, including Frank P. Crandon, Secretary of the Board of Trustees; and President Walter Dill Scott.

The series also includes correspondence, 1912-1923, with Mrs. Edward (Katherine) F. Wynn, a friend then living in New York City.

The miscellaneous writings include “An Appreciation” for Regina Watson, a friend and member of the Fortnightly Club; a report to the Northwestern University Board of Trustees in 1925 regarding women trustees; “Reminiscences” written for the Evanston Historical Society; and two other reminiscences pertaining mainly to her father Orrington Lunt.

The series also includes six bound volumes including four journals that span the years 1866 to 1867 and 1869 to 1872. These include descriptions of her travels in Europe and the Middle East. In addition she often transcribed letters to and from herself in her journals. The fifth volume includes an undated fictional piece entitled, “Romance, One Winter. The History of a Dream. Volume III.” She annotated this volume noting that, “I had ‘let myself go’; given full rein to imagination...” The sixth volume, “The Longfellow Birthday Book” was a gift in which she recorded the birthdays of members of the Lunt family and friends.

Cornelia Lunt’s *Sketches of Childhood and Girlhood*, privately published in 1925, is a reminiscence of the years 1847 to 1864. A copy may be found in the University Archives Reading Room. Photographs from the Cornelia Lunt Papers and the Orrington Lunt Papers were transferred to the University Archives Photographic Collection.

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Additional items pertaining to Cornelia Gray Lunt, including a note and two photographs, may be found among the holdings of the Special Collections Department of the Northwestern University Library. See their series LX, Box 1, Folder 17.

Provenance: Unknown.

Restrictions: None.

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Container List

<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Date</u>
1	1	Biographical Materials	1929-1964
	2	General Correspondence	1896-1927
	3	Correspondence with Mrs. Edward (Katherine) F. Wynn	1912-1917
	4	Correspondence with Mrs. Edward (Katherine) F. Wynn	1918-1921
	5	Correspondence with Mrs. Edward (Katherine) F. Wynn	1922-1923, n.d.
	6	Miscellaneous Writings	1917-1933
Vol.	1	Journal	November 1866- January 1867
	2	Journal	February 1867-June 1867
	3	Journal	June 1869-June 1872
	4	Journal	March-September 1872
	5	“Romance”	n.d.
	6	<u>“The Longfellow Birthday Book”</u>	n.d.